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ON AN ALLEGED REFERENCE TO AMITĀBHA IN A KHAROṢṬHĪ INSCRIPTION ON A GANDHĀRAN RELIEF

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1. *Background: Previous study and publication of the inscription*

This article concerns an inscription in Kharoṣṭhī script and Gāndhārī language on the pedestal of a Gandhāran relief sculpture which has been interpreted as referring to Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara, and thus as having an important bearing on the issue of the origins of the Mahāyāna. The sculpture in question (fig. 1) has had a rather complicated history. According to Brough (1982: 65), it was first seen in Taxila in August 1961 by Professor Charles Kieffer, from whom Brough obtained the photograph on which his edition of the inscription was based. Brough reported that "[o]n his [Kieffer's] return to Taxila a month later, the sculpture had disappeared, and no information about its whereabouts was forthcoming." Later on, however, it resurfaced as part of the collection of Dr. and Mrs. George Lehner, and is cited as such in Davidson 1968 (where the piece is illustrated on p. 23, fig. 23) and v. Mitterwallner 1987: 228 (illustrated on p. 229, fig. 4). In Lee 1993: 315, it is said to be in the Villanor Museum of Fine and Decorative Arts in Tampa, Florida, which has subsequently closed. Currently, the relief is in the collection of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida (accession no. MF 94.8.5)[1]. One of the authors of this article (Salomon) was able to study it there on March 21, 2001, and this direct examination of the original inscription has enabled us to clarify some important points concerning the inscription (see particularly part 2 below).

[1] The authors wish to thank the Ringling Museum, and in particular its Collections Manager, Rebecca Engelhardt, for facilitating our study of this object, for providing photographs of it, and for granting us permission to print them. Thanks are also due to Prof. John Huntington of Ohio State University for providing us with his photographs of the inscription in question.



Fig. 1: An inscribed Gandhāran relief
Unknown Artist, Gandharan.
Untitled (fragment of relief depicting a Buddha), 3rd-4th century A.D.
Gray schist, 12 × 9 1/2 inches, MF94.8.5
Gift of Eleanor B. Lehner, Collection of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida

The publication of this important inscription has similarly been subject to various vicissitudes and delays. In his 1982 edition of the inscription, entitled "Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara in an Inscribed Gandhāran Sculpture," Brough confessed to having waited until many years after receiving the photograph to publish it, and expressed his "regrets for so lengthy a delay," which was due "not only to pressure of other work, but also to some hesitation on my part about the inscription, which appeared to show unambiguously Mahāyāna names, and I hesitated to publish prematurely, in case some alternative reading might suggest itself. However, the inscription is clear enough, and I feel now that I must make it available to colleagues, and give to others the chance of agreeing or of proposing some other reading" (p. 65). The authors of the present article have also delayed this publication for many years, and for similar reasons. For although we do have such an alternative interpretation to propose, the inscription remains problematic and ambiguous in certain respects, and we do not claim to have decisively solved all of the problems. Nonetheless, in view of the great interest that the sculpture and accompanying inscription have aroused in Buddhological and art historical circles, we feel that it is important to point out that there are several problems with Brough's interpretation of the inscription — as he himself realized.

A timely reminder of the importance of this inscription, which finally stimulated us to complete the present article after a long delay, was recently provided in the form of a note in Fussman 1999: 543 n. 48[2], who, in the course of a detailed discussion of this inscription and its significance to the cult of Amitābha and Sukhāvatī, noted that "Schopen 1987, 130 n. 50 annonce un article de R. Salomon montrant que 'there is no reference in it to Amitābha at all, ... <which> seems very likely.' L'article n'est pas paru et je ne vois pas comment on pourrait lire l'inscription autrement." The alternative interpretation in question was briefly proposed in Salomon 1996: 444[3], but in the present article it is presented

[2] The inscription is also discussed in Fussman 1987: 73-4 (see also Fussman 1994: 36-7), and has also been referred to in other art historical studies, for example in v. Mitterwallner 1987: 228.

[3] "... the inscription on a Gandhāran sculpture published by Brough..., the correct reading of which seems to be *[*b]udhamitrasa... danamukhe budhamitrasa am(r)ida(e)*, 'Pious gift of Buddhamitra, for Buddhamitra's (own) immortality.'" This reading and

and explained in detail, in order to justify, albeit belatedly, the claim that "there is no reference in it to Amitābha at all." This reinterpretation will in turn unavoidably call into question the various conclusions that have been drawn on the basis of Brough's interpretation; for example, Fussman's tentative conclusion (1999: 546; see also p. 550) — wisely offered "avec quelques hésitations" — that "les étiquettes du relief publié par Brough permettent de reconnaître... Amitābha sur une série de quatre, peut-être cinq, reliefs provenant d'un même atelier dit de Sahr-i-Bahlol."

2. *The reading of the inscription*

According to Brough's description, the damaged relief on whose pedestal the inscription is written "is clearly a fragment of a sculpture which originally consisted of three figures, of which that to the right of the central Buddha has been lost, together with (presumably) about one-third of the inscription, or possibly slightly more" (Brough 1982: 65). The relief measures 30.5 cm in height by 24.1 cm in width. The inscription (fig. 2) covers a total space of 20 cm, and its individual letters range in height from 1.4 cm (*tra*) to 3.1 cm (*sa*); on average they are about 2 cm high. The height of the pedestal on which they are engraved varies from 3.7 to 4.0 cm.

Working solely from the poor photograph which C. Kieffer provided him, Brough (ibid., p. 66) read the inscription as:

> *budhamitrasa olo'iśpare danamukhe budhamitrasa amridaha...*

and translated it (p. 67):

> "The Avalokeśvara of Buddhamitra, a sacred gift, the Amr̥tābha of Buddhamitra..."

Fussman's reading (1999: 543) is identical to Brough's, and he translated similarly, "Don de Buddhamitra, <cet> Avalokiteśvara; <don> de Buddhamitra, <cet> Amitābha..."

Brough did, however, admit to some reservations (quoted above in the first part of this article) about his interpretation, and in our opinion these

translation has, however, now been revised as a result of an examination of the original inscription, as explained below in part 2.



Fig. 2: Detail of the inscription on the relief

doubts are not at all unjustified, particularly with regard to the five syllables at the end of the surviving portion of the inscription, which he read as *amridaha* and interpreted as equivalent to Sanskrit Amr̥tābha or Amitābha. The second syllable of this word was correctly read by Brough as *mri*[4], though with the comment (p. 67) "the attachment of the conjunct *-r* sign to the vowel stroke is not known to me elsewhere, but I can see no other interpretation" (similarly Fussman 1999: 544 n. 49, "sans exemple en kharoṣṭhī"). But now, an identical syllable[5] has been found in two Kharoṣṭhī manuscript fragments in the Schøyen collection[6]. In Schøyen

[4] In the Kieffer photograph published in Brough 1982: 69, the upper portion of the *i-* vowel diacritic above the horizontal curve of the consonant *m* is not clearly visible, so that the letter looks somewhat like a *kṣa* with a subscribed *r*. But on the original and in the photographs published here (figs. 2 and 4), the upper portion of the *i* diacritic is clear.

[5] This parallel was pointed out to us by Andrew Glass.

[6] On the Schøyen collection in general, see Braarvig 2000; on the Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts therein, see Salomon forthcoming: part II.2, and Allon and Salomon 2000.

us to expect a similarly Sanskritized spelling for the second half. Thus if the underlying name were in fact Amṛtābha or the like, we would have expected it to be written here as *amridabhe* (or *amridabhu, amridabho,* etc., these all being possible nominative singular masculine endings in Gāndhārī), or perhaps *amridavhe* etc.; but hardly as *amridae.*

Thus in contrast to the several philological and orthographic problems involved in interpreting the word *amridae* as the equivalent of Amitābha or a similar name, taking it as the equivalent of Sanskrit *amṛtāya* is straightforward, regular and fits into the normal inscriptional pattern. Common sense urges us to accept it, or at least prefer it.

The only other point of contention — but an important one — with regard to the reading of the inscription is the first letter, which Brough read as "b*u*," and took as the first syllable of *budhamitrasa.* It is not exactly clear how he arrived at the reading b*u,* where his italic *u* presumably designates an incomplete or unclear element of the syllable. Brough does note that there is "a very small fragment... lost from the right-hand side of the plinth," (p. 66), but he does not explain how this determined or affected his reading; in the Kieffer photograph which he used, there is little if any trace of a letter at the beginning of the inscription, before the first *dha.* Thus Brough presumably arrived at the reading *budhamitrasa* for the first word under the influence of the clear reading of this word later in the inscription.

But now that we have access to the original inscription and to the better photographs printed with this article, it behooves us to determine whether this reading, or rather reconstruction, is correct; and the answer is that it is not. The *dha*, which is actually the first letter of the inscription, is very close to what is definitely the original right edge of the pedestal (fig. 3). To the right of the *dha*, a small triangular portion of the upper right corner of the pedestal, 1.3 cm in maximum length (at the top) and 2.2 cm in height, is broken off (as was noted by Brough [p. 66], quoted above). It is theoretically conceivable that there had originally been on this lost section part of a syllable *bu*, tucked up closely against the following *dha* as is done in the word *budhamitrasa* further on in the inscription. However, if this had been the case, at least part of the *u* diacritic at the base of the syllable would have survived at the intact portion of the bottom of the right edge of the pedestal. But a careful examination

of the original established beyond doubt that there is no trace of any part of an otherwise lost syllable before the *dha*[8].

Thus our revised reading of the inscription, on the basis of an examination of the original, is:

dhamitrasa oloiśpare[9] *danamukhe budhamitrasa amridae* ///

Skipping for the time being the problematic second word, *oloiśpare*, our provisional translation[10] of the rest of the inscription is:

"Gift of Dhamitra [*sic*]... for the immortality of Buddhamitra..."

3. *Formulaic patterns as a guide to the interpretation of the inscription*

Buddhist inscriptions in general, and Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī dedicatory inscriptions in particular, typically are strongly formulaic in character, and their interpretation should always be guided by reference to attested standard patterns and formulae (see e.g. Salomon 1981: 18-19). Any interpretation which does not accord, at least approximately, with such normal patterns is *prima facie* suspect, though not automatically wrong, whereas an alternative interpretation which does follow normal patterns is preferable. According to the reading and interpretation of this inscription proposed by Brough ("The Avalokeśvara of Buddhamitra, a sacred gift, the Amr̥tābha of Buddhamitra..."), and accepted by Fussman, it would constitute a sort of combined donative record and set of labels for the two surviving figures (and presumably also for the missing third one, which would have been contained in the lost ending of the inscription). In support of this, Brough notes that "the names of the Bodhisattva and

[8] On some photographs of the inscription, there does appear to be a faint trace of what could be the left side of the loop of such an *u* diacritic below the broken corner of the pedestal, but our examination of the original showed that this is definitely not part of an incised letter, but only a superficial and insignificant bruising of the surface.

[9] Below each of the first three *akṣaras* of the word *oloiśpare* are three vertical lines, of which the second (under *lo*) is placed higher than the others, with its top lying between the second and third syllables of the group (fig. 3). It is not clear what, if any, significance these extraneous lines might have had, but in any case they do not affect the reading of the inscription.

[10] A complete translation will be presented below in part 5, after a discussion of other issues that are critical to a full understanding of the inscription.

the Buddha come immediately below the figures to which they refer, and it is possible that the two facts are connected" (1982: 67), although we would maintain that the relative location of the words in question (which we interpret differently) is merely a coincidence.

Both Brough and Fussman recognized that this interpretation would not fit into *any* of the normal categories of Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions. Brough conceded that "[t]he inscription is of a somewhat unusual form" and that "[t]he repetition of the donor's name is curious" (ibid.), while Fussman remarked that "[l]e formulaire de l'inscription est inusuel, mais le sens est clair" (1999: 543).

Such a formulation would in fact be not only unusual, but unique. As far as we have been able to determine, no other Kharoṣṭhi inscription, and for that matter no other Buddhist inscription of any kind, follows such a pattern. If, on the other hand, we read and interpret (as proposed above) the last surviving word as a dative *amridae* = Sanskrit *amṛtāya*, meaning literally "for the immortality (of Buddhamitra)," the inscription contains all of the normal elements of the donative formulae of Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions: the donor's name in the genitive case (*dhamitrasa*); a statement of the gift in the nominative (*danamukhe*); the intended result or purpose of the donation in the dative (*amridae*), and the name of the intended beneficiary in the genitive (*budhamitrasa*), governed by the aforementioned noun in the dative. A typical example of an inscription of this type is the Jamālgaṛhī pedestal inscription (Konow 1929: 114 [no. XLVI]), which reads[11]:

> *[aṃ]bae savaseṭhabhariae daṇamukhe sa[rva](*sa)tvaṇa puyae spamiasa [ca a]ro[ga]dakṣiṇi*
> Gift of Ambā, wife of Savaseṭha, for the honoring of all beings and for the good health of [her] husband.

Another example is the Shahr-i-Nāpursān pedestal inscription (ibid., p. 124 [no. LVIII]):

> *saṃghamitrasa(ṃ) ṣamaṇasa da[ṇa]mukhe budhorumasa arogadakṣi(*ṇae)*
> Gift of the monk Saṅghamitra, for the good health of Budhoruma [Buddhavarma].

[11] This reading and translation is a corrected version of the one given by Konow.

Note that in both of these records the object that is given — that is, the image on which the inscription is engraved — is referred to only by the general term *daṇamukha-* "gift," and that the figure or figures represented in that image are not mentioned; and this is the standard pattern.

We therefore propose to interpret the inscription in question according to this well attested pattern, and translate it accordingly as "Gift of Dhamitra... for the immortality of Buddhamitra." But we admit that some problems and uncertainties remain in this interpretation. The first of these is that *amr̥ta-* is not one of the terms which are most commonly used to express the intended result of the gift in Kharoṣṭhī donative inscriptions. More typical expressions in this context are *puyae* "for the honoring of," *arogadakṣiṇae* "for the good health of" (both of these occurring in the specimen inscriptions cited above), *hitae* "for the benefit of", and the like (see Konow 1929: cxvii). Various other expressions are also attested, though less commonly, such as *vardhase*, *ayubalavardhie*, and *dirghayu [*ta bhavatu]* (Konow, ibid.). The equivalent of Sanskrit *amr̥ta-* as such does not seem to have been previously attested in Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, but the Panjtār inscription (ibid., p.70 [no. XXVI]) has what may be a similar expression in the phrase *p[u]ñakareneva amata śivathala rama.... ma* (line 3), which Konow tentatively translated as "Through this meritorious deed... immortal places of bliss," taking *amata* as equivalent to Sanskrit *amr̥ta*.

The latter phrase is however damaged and problematic, and hence does not offer very strong support for our interpretation of the "Amitābha" inscription. More to the point is the fact that the word *amr̥ta* and various phrases containing it, such as Sanskrit *amr̥tam padam* / Pali *amataṃ padaṃ,* are *commonly* used as expressions for *nirvāṇa* (*the Critical Pali Dictionary*, for example, gives more than two dozen canonical references for *amata* as "a synonym of nibbāna"), and a wish for the attainment of *nirvāṇa* is one of the stated intentions found in other Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions. For example, the silver reliquary inscription of Indravarma (inscription no. VI; Salomon 1996: 428) concludes with *sarva satva pariṇivaito*, "all beings are [hereby] caused to attain nirvāṇa." The "Aśo-raya inscription" (Bailey 1982: 149) similarly ends with *s̱arva s̱atva paraṇivaiti*, and the inscription of Ajitasena (Fussman 1986) concludes (line 6) *ṇivaṇae saba[va]du*, "May it be for nirvāṇa."

Thus a wish for *nirvāṇa* seems to have been a normal one in Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, and since *amṛta* is a common synonym for *nirvāṇa*, the word *amridae* in our inscription can be said to be at least broadly consistent with the normal formulaic patterns of Kharoṣṭhī donative records. Moreover, in a Brāhmī inscription on the pedestal of a Buddha image in the British Museum, dated by D.C. Sircar (1968-9: 269) to the fourth or fifth century A.D., the intention of the dedication of the image is stated as *satvānām eva tacchāntyai syād eṣāṃ cāmṛtaprada[m]*, "May it be for the peace of [all] beings, and [may it] produce immortality [i.e. *nirvāṇa*] for them." So here we do have, at least in a Buddhist inscription of a somewhat later period, the explicit use of the word *amṛta* "immortality, *nirvāṇa*" to express the intention of a dedication.

The other main difficulty about our proposed interpretation of the inscription is the peculiarity of the donor's name, Dhamitra. It was perhaps this peculiarity that induced Brough and, following him, Fussman and others, to read the donor's name as *budhamitra*, i.e. the common Buddhist name Buddhamitra. But as discussed in the previous section, an examination of the original object has now shown that this is definitely not correct. Although *dhamitrasa* is hardly a normal Buddhist name, this is clearly the reading, and we have to deal with it. One solution is to propose that the intended reading was *dha<*rma>mitrasa*, i.e. that the donor's name was the common Dharmamitra[12], from which the scribe accidently omitted the second syllable. But this is perhaps too speculative, especially since the inscription as a whole is well written and the scribe and/or engraver seem to have been quite competent (which is by no means always the case in inscriptions of this type). But it is also possible that, strange as it may seem to us, *dhamitra* was in fact the donor's name; peculiar names are, after all, not at all rare in Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions.

Thus we cannot be sure exactly how we are to understand the donor's name. But it is certain that, contrary to what Brough and Fussman thought,

[12] This name is attested, for example, in a Jauliān inscription (Konow 1929: 95 [no. XXXVI.5]) and in a Kharoṣṭhī graffito *(dharmamitro)* from Hunza-Haldeikish (Neelis 2001: 171), as well as in other graffiti in Brāhmī from the Northern Areas of Pakistan (ibid.).

there is no repetition of the donor's name[13], and this is a crucial point. Both of them acknowledged that such a repetition, according to their understanding of the inscription, was "curious" (Brough 1982: 67) or "très inhabituel" (Fussman 1999: 544), and understood it to mean that the inscription consisted of labels of the (originally) three main buddha/ bodhisattva figures, with each of their names preceded by the donor's name, repeated three times (the last time now lost). But now that it is clear that in fact there is no such repetition of the donor's name, their interpretation is no longer possible, and the inscription can be seen to follow the standard pattern for donative Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions: it records a pious gift by one person named, apparently, Dhamitra, given in honor of another, Buddhamitra.

To judge from the usual pattern of similar inscriptions, the latter person was probably the donor's "companion" or "co-residential pupil" (*sadaviyari* < Skt. *sārdhaṃvihārin-* or *sadayari* < Skt. *sārdhaṃcārin-* according to Konow 1929: 109), a technical term found in several Kharoṣṭhī donative inscriptions[14]. Among such inscriptions, it is not unusual to find pairings of similar names of a monk and his *sadaviyari*, like Dha<*rma?>mitra and Buddhamitra in our inscription; for example, two Kharoṣṭhī dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures from Loriyān Tangai read *budhamitrasa [bu]dharakṣidasa sadayarisa daṇa[mukhe]*, "Gift of Buddhamitra, the companion of Buddharakṣita" (Konow: 1929: 109 [no. XLII]) and *sihamitrasa daṇamukhe s[i]hil[i]asa sadavi(*yarisa)*, "Gift of Siṃhamitra, the companion of Siṃhilika" (ibid., p.110 [no. XLIV]).

Thus it is clear that — but for the problematic word *oloiśpare* discussed in the following section — the new inscription follows exactly the standard pattern of Kharoṣṭhī donative inscriptions, and should be interpreted accordingly. In light of this, there is no question of it consisting of a sequence of labels referring to the figures depicted in the accompanying

13 Unless, of course, one were to propose that the scribe omitted, not the second syllable as proposed above, but rather the first, and that we should thus read <**bu*>*dhamitrasa*; but this would be a most unlikely error for an evidently careful scribe to make, and the possibility can be dismissed out of hand.

14 For further comments on the origin and meanings of this term, see Brough 1962: xx-xxi and 177; also Schopen 2003: ch. I (pp. 95-96 of original publication); ch. II, esp. ns. 16-18.

relief, and thus it certainly does not contain an early epigraphical reference to the Buddha Amitābha, as has hitherto been thought.

4. *The problem of* oloiśpare

Until now, we have passed over the problem of the significance and meaning of the word *oloiśpare*. Brough and Fussman took this as a label identifying the figure represented at the right side of the sculpture as the bodhisattva who is generally known as Avalokiteśvara. Brough commented that "[t]he figure on the Buddha's left must be Avalokiteśvara. The identification is already clear from the lotus which he holds, and the high crest on his headdress, which must contain the small Buddha-figure typical of this Bodhisattva" (1982: 65). But Lee, with access to a better photograph, observed that "[t]he stele... does not, in fact, have a Buddha on the crown" (1993: 315 n. 25). And there is still no agreement that the lotus at this stage necessarily identifies Avalokiteśvara; Davidson (1968: 23) in fact identified the figure in question as Maitreya.

But there are also philological grounds for doubting that the figure in question is Avalokiteśvara, or rather, that the inscription is intended to label it as such. Brough (1982: 67-8) attempted to explain the Gāndhārī name *oloiśpare* as equivalent to either *Ālokeśvara or *Ulokeśvara, the latter based on the Ṛg Vedic *uloka* = later Sanskrit *loka*. Neither equation can be dismissed as definitely wrong, but both are far from certain, and the point leads to complex issues about the forms and origin of the name Avalokiteśvara which cannot be pursued here.

Thus, the philological evidence, like the iconographic, being inconclusive, we turn to the epigraphic material, which is, in any case, our main concern here. The important point here is that it would be very much out of the normal pattern for a Kharoṣṭhī donative inscription on a sculpture to include a specification, or label, of the figures illustrated. Even in the more or less contemporary Mathurā inscriptions in which such a figure is identified, that identification is never a label as such, but rather always a part of the description of the act of installing the image concerned, as in the following examples:

> ...*bodhisaco paṭithāpito*..., "... the Bodhisattva was set up..." (Lüders 1961: 31 [no. 1]; his translation).

bhagavato ś[ā]kyamunisya pratimā pratiṣṭhāpitā..., "The image of the holy Śākyamuni has been set up..." (ibid., p. 33 [no. 4]).
... *bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya pratimā pratiṣṭh(ā)pi[tā]*, "... an image of the Blessed One, the Buddha Amitābha was set up..." (Schopen 1987: 101, 111).

Moreover, when we turn to other inscribed Gandhāran reliefs similar to ours, we find that in none of these does the inscription identify the figures being depicted. For example:

- The inscription on the Begrām relief, "which has been interpreted as representing the Buddha's first interview with Bimbisāra or the invitation to preach addressed to Bhavagat by Brahmā and Indra" (Konow 1933a: 11 and pl.), says only *...y[e] a[ṃ]tariye danaṃmuhe imeṇa kuśalamuleṇa pituno pujae [bhavatu]*, "... gift of Antarī; through this root of bliss (may it be) for the honoring of her father" (ibid., p. 14).
- The inscription on "un bas-relief au turban" (Fussman 1980: 54-6), which "représente six personnages rendant hommage au turban abandonné par le futur Buddha au moment du Grand Départ," says only: *śivarakṣitasa taḍekhiyasa*[15] *damarakṣitaputrasa danamukhe mata[pitara] puyae*, "Gift of Śivarakṣita, from Taḍekha, son of Damarakṣita, for the honoring of his mother and father."
- The inscription on yet another relief — this one interpreted as representing "le grand miracle de Śrāvastī" (Fussman 1974: 57) — reads (ibid., p. 54) *sa[ṃ] 4 1 phagunasa masasa di paṃcami budhanadasa trepiḍakasa danamukhe madapidarana adhvadidana puyaya bhavatu*, "Year 5, on the fifth day of the month Phalguna. Gift of Buddhananda, who knows the Tripiṭaka. May it be for the honoring of his late mother and father."
- The same pattern holds for the Mamāne Dherī relief of the year 89 (Konow 1929: 172 [no. LXXXVIII]; revised reading in Konow 1933b: 15) in which Indra's visit to the Buddha at the Indraśaila cave is represented:... *niryaide ime deyadharme dharmapriena ṣamanena piduno arogadakṣinae upajayasa budhapriasa puyae samanuyayaṇa arogadakṣinae*, "This pious gift was given by the monk Dharmapriya, for the good health of his father, for the honoring of his teacher Buddhapriya, for the good health of his fellow disciples."

In none of these parallel texts does the inscription have anything to do with, or make any reference to, what or who is being represented in the

[15] Fussman's published text and translation here read *Taḍakhiyasa* and "de Taḍakha", but the correction to *Taḍekhiyasa* and "de Taḍekha" respectively have been entered in the author's hand in an offprint copy supplied by him.

accompanying sculpture. This in fact is overwhelmingly characteristic of Kharoṣṭhī image inscriptions as a whole. More than forty Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions on Gandhāran images or reliefs are now known. Of these, at least five are so fragmentary that their content cannot be determined, but the overwhelming majority of the others records the gift of — presumably — the image or relief on which they are written. Not a single one of these inscriptions, however, makes any reference to the image itself or to individual(s) being represented in it[16]. There are only five possible exceptions which are as close as we get to "labels" in Kharoṣṭhī image dedication inscriptions[17], and there is some uncertainty about all or most of these.

Three inscriptions associated with images at Jauliān might be "labels." The clearest case is Konow's no. XXXVI.11 (1929: 97), which reads *kaśavo tathagato*, "The Tathāgata Kāśyapa." In light of it, Konow's no. XXXVI.9 (p. 96) might also be taken as a "label": *[kaśav]o tathagato s... hasa śa...*, but the reading is very uncertain. Even more uncertain is the third example from Jauliān (Konow's no. XXXVI.12, p. 97), which Konow reads as *śakamu[ni*] tathagato ji(?)na(?)eśa(?) da(?)ṇamukho(?)* and translates "Śākyamuni, the Tathāgata, lord of Jinas, a gift"; here the number of question marks in his transcript shows how problematic the reading is. Even if we accept all three Jauliān inscriptions as "labels," the most that we can say is that in these apparent label inscriptions the Buddha's

[16] One partial exception, which constitutes a special case in several respects, is the Mathurā biscript (Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī) pedestal inscription (Bhattacharya 1984). The Brāhmī portion of this inscription reads in part (following Bhattacharya, ibid., p. 29; line 2) ... *ghaṭṭas[ya] dana bodhisatva*, "... gift of...-ghaṭṭa, a bodhisattva," while the extant portion of the Kharoṣṭhī inscription in line 4 reads *[bu]dhasa pratime mahadaṃḍanayakasa Ehaḍa...*, "Image of Buddha, (*gift) of the Supreme Commander Ehaḍa-..." Here we do have, uniquely and contrary to what has been said above, an explicit reference to a sculptured figure in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription on a sculpture. But in this unique biscript inscription from Mathurā the Kharoṣṭhī portion seems to constitute something of an afterthought, so that it is not surprising that its formulation should follow a pattern more typical of Brāhmī inscriptions from Mathurā. Therefore the Kharoṣṭhī portion of this inscription cannot be taken to be in any way representative of normal Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions from the northwest.

[17] Not included in this class is the inscription on a statuette of Śrī, labelled as such (*[ś]iriye paḍima*; Fussman 1988: 2), since this is a simple label inscription and not a donative/dedicatory record. Fussman (ibid., p. 6) comments on "[l]a présence, exceptionnelle dans l'épigraphie kharoṣṭhī, d'une étiquette."

name always occurs in the nominative, and is always accompanied with at least one of the standard epithets of a Buddha, namely *tathāgata*; and that the donor's name never occurs in them.[18] It is worth noting that these three labels occur as a part of a series of thirteen inscriptions — all similarly placed under reliefs — the other ten of which are all clearly donative inscriptions with no reference to the associated reliefs; e.g. *dharmamitrasa bhikṣ[usa na]garaka[sa] danamukho* (no. XXXVI.5, p. 95). This might well render nos. 11, 9, and 12 even more suspect.

With regard to the question of the date of the Jauliān inscriptions, Marshall (*teste* Konow, 1929: 92) assigned both the images and the inscriptions to "about the fifth century," but noted that they are a part of the repairs and redecorations that were done at the site. Konow, in light of the oddly mixed palaeography of these inscriptions, thought that "[i]t is even conceivable that some of the inscriptions are copies of older ones, executed when the old images and decorations were restored or repaired" (ibid., p. 93). However this may be, it is certain that these inscriptions are not early, and are in fact probably among the latest of Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions. Thus their format and formulae may not in any case be typical of the more abundant Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions from earlier centuries such as the one under consideration here, which, according to Fussman (1999: 543), "l'étude paléographique incite à placer au premier siècle de l'ère kouchane."

A fourth Kharoṣṭhī inscription which has been taken as a donative record incorporating a label to the accompanying sculptural figure is the Nowshera pedestal inscription (Konow 1929: 134 [no. LXXI]), reading *dhivhakarasa takhtidreṇa karide*, which Konow translates as "Of Dīpaṃkara, made by Takhtidra," noting that "*Dhivhakarasa* may correspond to Skr. *Dīpaṁkarasya* and be the name of the donor or of the Buddha pictured in the sculpture" (ibid.). But two points speak against *dhivhakarasa* being "the name of... the Buddha pictured in the sculpture." First, from the Jauliān inscriptions discussed above (e.g. *kaśavo tathagato*), as also from the Mathurā inscriptions (e.g. *bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya*),

[18] Unless, perhaps, the missing portion of no. XXXVI.9 contained a donor's name; but this is pure speculation, since Konow (1929: 96) comments on this section, "I cannot make anything out of this state of things."

it appears that when the figure depicted in the sculpture is mentioned in the accompanying inscription, he is never mentioned by his name alone. If the proper name occurs at all, it is always joined with at least one standard epithet, such as *tathāgata*, *buddha*, or *bhagavat*. The importance of the epithet is clear from the fact that it — unlike the proper name — can appear by itself, as, for example, in *bodhisaco paṭithāpito* in a Mathurā inscription (Lüders no. 1) quoted above. In fact, it is extremely doubtful whether a buddha (or a bodhisattva) would ever be mentioned by name alone.

The second point against taking *dhivhakarasa* as referring to the Buddha is its genitive case. The inscription, which appears to be complete, seems to require a noun in the nominative to be understood. While this implied word could, in theory, be *paḍima* "[This] image" or the like, a far more likely interpretation would be to supply *daṇamukha-* "[This is the] gift [of]." For the former term (*paḍima*) occurs among Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions only once, in a unique example of a pure — that is, non-donative — label inscription (see note 17), whereas the latter term is abundantly attested in the normal donative formula. It should also be noted that in the Jauliān label inscriptions, the names and titles are always in the nominative, not the genitive.

The two considerations which indicate that the Nowshera inscription is not a donative label might seem to support an interpretation of the Yākubi inscription (Konow 1929: 133 [no. LXVI]) as a specimen of this elusive genre. Konow reads the inscription *...danamukhe*[19] *sa[cabha]miteṣ[u] jinakumaro hidag[r]amava[stavena*] racito* and translates "Gift (of....), the young Jina among those who were confounded through truth, executed by the resident of Hida village..." The relief on which this inscription is written has been identified by Foucher *(teste* Konow, ibid., p. 131) as representing the miracle of Śrāvastī, and Konow's interpretation of the inscription is explicitly connected with this identification. He says: "I therefore read *sachabhamitesh[u]*, Skr. *satyabhramiteshu*, among those who had become confounded through the truth, and see in this word a reference to the tīrthyas whom the Buddha confounded through his miracles

[19] Brough (1982: 68) notes that the correct reading of this word is *danamokhe*.

and preaching at Śrāvastī" (p.132). But note that even if Konow's reading and interpretation are correct, the inscription would be primarily labelling the scene, rather than the principal person in it, and apart from the railings at Bhārhut and the old stele from Amarāvatī (Ghosh and Sarkar 1964-5), such labels are exceedingly rare.

Even the one other roughly contemporaneous record that has been taken as such a label can now be shown not to be such. Majumdar read what he says is a Kuṣāṇa inscription found on the pedestal of an image recovered from Sāñcī, but made of Mathuran sandstone, as *bhagava[sya] (*śākyamuni)sya jambuchāyā-śilā gr̥[ha]ś ca dharmadeva-vihāre pratiṣṭāpitā* and translated this as "a stone (image depicting) the 'Jambu-shade' (episode) of the Bhagavat (Śākyamuni) and a shrine were established in the Dharmadeva Monastery" (N.G. Majumdar in Marshall and Foucher 1940: 1.386). But it now seems fairly certain that the inscription is not referring to an "episode" but to a specific type of image called the "Jambucchāyika-pratimā" which is referred to by this name more than half a dozen times in the Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya (Schopen 1997: 273-4 and n. 77).

Moreover, if Konow's reading and interpretations of the Nowshera inscription were correct, and if this inscription was a kind of label, several problems would still remain. First, the Buddha is referred to, not by name, but by a title, *jinakumaro,* which seems to be unattested elsewhere either in inscriptions or in Buddhist literature. Second, the Buddha himself is not actually named. Further, the inscription is damaged and incomplete, so that Konow's reading and interpretation are far from sure. And finally, the characters of the inscription — like those of the Jauliān label — "point to a comparatively late date" (Konow 1929: 132).

It should be clear from all this that labels of any kind are very rare in Kharoṣṭhī image inscriptions, and that when they do occur, they are typically late. Moreover, in no case is a religious figure labelled by his name alone. The name, if it occurs, is always accompanied by a religious title; the name can be omitted, but never the title. Moreover, this pattern holds not just in image inscriptions but also for Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions in general. There are now more than two dozen Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions that refer to the relics of the Buddha, and in none of these is he referred to by name only. In about a fourth of these we find just the title *bhagavato* or the like

(for example Konow 1929: nos. XVII, XXVII, XXXI, LXII; Fussman 1985: 37; Salomon 1995: 136); in almost three fourths, the name Śākyamuni combined with one or more titles (e.g. *śakamunisa bhag(r)avato*, *bhak(r)avat(r)o śakamunisa budhasa*, and *bhag(r)avada śakyamuṇe*, in Konow 1929: nos. I, XV, LXXXVI respectively); in one instance *bodhisatvaśarira* (ibid., no. LXXXII); and in another, read "with every reserve," *gotamaṣamaṇasa* (ibid., no. LXXIX). The same pattern holds even in two inscriptions which appear to be pure labels: the inscription on the footprint slab from Tīrath (ibid., no.V) reads *bodhasa śakamunisa padaṇi*, "The footprints of the Buddha Śākyamuni," and the inscription on a small stone from Rawal (ibid., no. XVI), which "shows in relievo a decorated elephant, trotting toward the right," reads *śastakhadhatu*, "The collar-bone relic of the Teacher."

If this pattern is consistent in early inscriptions with regard to Śākyamuni, it should hold in regard to other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as well. And indeed, in the Nigali Sagar inscription (Hultzsch 1924: 165) Aśoka refers, not simply to "Konākamana," but to "the Buddha Konākamana" *(budhasa konākamanasa)*. The Bhārhut labels similarly refer not to Vipasi, Vesabhu, etc., but rather to "the Blessed One Vipasi" *(bhagavato vipasino)* and "the Blessed One Vesabhu" *(bhagavato vesabhuṇā)*, etc. (Lüders 1963: 82, 84). More directly relevant to the interpretation of the Kharoṣṭhī inscription with which we are concerned here, the sole undoubted reference to Amitābha in early Indian epigraphy — a Mathurā Brāhmī inscription dated in the 26th year of Huviṣka — similarly does not refer to him by his name alone, but as "the Blessed One, the Buddha Amitābha" (*bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya*; Schopen 1987: 101, 111). And in a nearly contemporary image inscription from Sāñcī we have reference not to Maitreya, but to "the Bodhisattva Maitreya" (*(bodhi)satvasya m[ai]treyasya*; Marshall and Foucher 1940: 1.387).

In later inscriptions too, when Avalokiteśvara is certainly mentioned, he is never referred to by his name alone. Thus we find *aryāvalokiteśvara* in a fifth century inscription from Mathurā (Srinivasan 1971 [1981]: 12); again *āryyāvalokiteśvara* in a copper-plate grant from Guṇaighar dating from the very beginning of the sixth century (Sircar 1965: 341); *bhagavadāryyāvalokiteśvara* in yet another sixth century grant from Jayrāmpur (ibid., 531); and *arya va[l]o[ki] III* and *ārya valokiteśvaro bodhisatvaḥ*

among the graffiti from northern Pakistan (von Hinüber 1989: 86, 89). The same pattern continues to hold throughout the later periods as well. This highly consistent epigraphic usage would suggest that an exalted religious figure such as a buddha or bodhisattva could not be referred to by his name only, and it is therefore most unlikely that our inscription would do so.

A similar sensitivity towards appropriate titles is also found in the literary sources. Perhaps the best known passage in canonical literature which exhibits a concern with the proper way of referring to a buddha occurs in the various accounts of the Buddha's first meeting with the five Bhadravargīya, or first disciples. In the Lalitavistara version, an essentially Sarvāstivādin account and therefore probably available in the northwest, when "the five" address the Buddha as "Venerable Gautama" (*svāgataṃ te āyuṣman Gautama*, etc.; Lefmann 1902-08: 1.408), he responds by saying: *mā yūyaṃ bhikṣavas tathāgatam āyuṣmadvādena samudācariṣṭa. mā vo 'bhūd dīrgharātram arthāya hitāya sukhāya. amṛtaṃ mayā bhikṣavaḥ sākṣātkṛto... buddho 'ham asmi bhikṣavaḥ* ("Monks, do not address the Tathāgata with the title 'Venerable.' This would not cause you profit, advantage and happiness for a long time. Monks, I have witnessed immortality... I am a Buddha, Monks"; ibid., p. 409). Another version of the same event, contained in the Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya (Gnoli 1978: 133) and hence also probably available in the northwest, is even more explicit. Here the text says first *pañcakā bhikṣavo bhagavantam atyarthaṃ nāmavādena gotravādena āyuṣmadvādena samudācaranti* ("The five monks wrongly addressed the Blessed One by his personal name, by his clan name, and by the title 'Venerable'"), to which the Buddha reacted: *mā yūyaṃ bhikṣavas tathāgataṃ atyarthaṃ nāmavādena gotravādena ayuṣmadvādena samudācarata; mā vo bhūd dīrgharātraṃ anarthāyāhitāya duḥkhāya* ("Monks, do not address the Tathāgata wrongly by his personal name, by his clan name, and by the title 'Venerable,' lest it cause you loss, disadvantage, and unhappiness for a long time").

Thus referring to a Buddha by his personal name, by his *gotra* name, or even by the conventionally polite "Venerable" was not only inappropriate, but also was thought to have undesirable karmic consequences. The point of these passages seems to be that a buddha should always be explicitly addressed as such, and epigraphic usage clearly and consistently

confirms this. The interpretation of our inscription proposed by Brough and Fussman, according to which Avalokiteśvara and Amitābha are referred to without any titles at all, would thus violate not only established epigraphic usage, but canonical rule as well, both of which would seem to virtually preclude any reference to a Buddha by name only in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription. This point applies both to Amitābha, whose alleged presence in the inscription has already been rejected on other grounds, and to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as well; if our inscription is not a label, then even if *oloiśpare* is a personal name, it almost certainly cannot refer to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, since it is not accompanied by a title, whereas in every other epigraphic instance in which Avalokiteśvara is definitely referred to, he — like all Buddhist worthies — has one or more descriptive or honorific titles.

But this still leaves us with the problem of *oloiśpare*. Obviously, if, as seems likely on several grounds, the name *oloiśpare* has nothing to do with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, it is incumbent on us to offer a better solution, and here we run into difficulty. As always, the problem is best approached comparing standard formulae used in similar inscriptions. This approach shows that the problematic word occurs in a position, between the proper name of the donor and the word *danamukhe*, where, almost without exception in other Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, there appears some description or qualification of the donor. Such qualifications are typically either:

– Titles, such as *ṣamaṇa* or *bhikṣu*, "monk," for example in the Shahr-i-Nāpursān pedestal inscription (Konow 1929: 124 [no. LVIII]), *saṃghamitrasa(ṃ) ṣamaṇasa da[ṇa]mukhe*, and in Jauliān inscription no. 4 (ibid., p. 94 [no. XXXVI.4]), *budharakṣi[dasa] bhi[kṣusa] da[namu]kho* (similarly in Jauliān nos. 2, 5, and 6); or:
– Patronymics, as in the Bimaran casket inscription (ibid., p. 52 [no. XVIII]), *śivarakṣit(r)asa mu[ṃ]javadaput[r]asa danamuhe*.

In at least one case, namely Jauliān no. 5, a second qualification, apparently a geographical designation, is added to the title *bhikṣu*: *dharmamitrasa bhikṣ[usa na]garaka[sa] danamukho*, which Konow (p. 95) translates "Gift of Dharmamitra, the friar from Nagara."

These consistent patterns lead us to expect that *oloiśpare*, coming between the donor's name and the word *danamukhe*, would be some such

qualification of the donor. The problem, however, is that, unlike the examples of similar sequences cited above and the many others that could be cited, the intervening word in our inscription is not in the expected genitive, modifying the donor's name in the same case, but instead ends in *-e*, which could be either nominative or locative, but certainly not genitive. If *oloiśpare* is locative, it could perhaps be taken as qualifying the residence of the donor ("Dhamitra at [i.e. of] Oloiśpara"); but this is admittedly unlikely, as the usual phrasing for such a qualification would involve the toponym compounded with a word such as *vastava-*, "resident of."

Thus it may be preferable to take *oloiśpare* as a locative denoting, not the residence of the donor, but the location of the donation, as in an inscription on a statue from Loriyān Tangai (Konow 1929: 108 [no. XLI]), reading *bu[dh]orumasa danamukh[e] Khaṁda[vanatu]baga[mi]*, "Gift of Buddhavarma, in the Khaṇḍavana stūpa." A possible objection to this interpretation is that the word denoting the locus of the donation in the Loriyān Tangai inscription comes after *danamukhe*, at the end of the inscription, rather than between the donor's name and the *daṇamukhe*; but this is a relatively minor matter, and at least does not rule the possibility out entirely. Another problem is that *oloiśpara* is nowhere attested as a toponym, nor can it be readily related to any known toponym, ancient or modern, in the region; unless, perhaps, it might be somehow related to the well attested *oḍi*, in the lower Swat Valley (Salomon 1986: 290).

In the end, though, however *oloiśpara* be interpreted, it cannot refer to Avalokiteśvara if our interpretation of *amridae* is correct: if there is no reference in the inscription to the central figure of the relief (i.e., as Amitābha) then a reference to a secondary figure (i.e., Avalokiteśvara) would make no sense at all!

5. *Conclusion: A revised interpretation*

Although our suggestions in regard to *oloiśpare* are admittedly inconclusive, they seem to us the best possibility in the current state of our knowledge. We therefore read and provisionally translate the inscription as

> *dhamitrasa oloiśpare danamukhe budhamitrasa amridae ///*
> "Gift of Dhamitra [*sic*] at Oloiśpara [?], for the immortality [i.e. *nirvāṇa*] of Buddhamitra..."

As for the missing portion of the inscription lost at the left side, we will obviously not be in agreement with Fussman, who thinks that it would have contained the name of the third, missing figure of the sculpture ("Il faudrait ainsi compléter l'inscription: <<[don de Buddhamitra, <ce> Mahāsthāmaprāpta]>>" (1999: 543). Rather, the typical pattern of Kharoṣṭhī donative inscriptions would lead us to expect a secondary blessing (in addition to the surviving *budhamitrasa amridae*). Such an additional invocation might have included the expression *arogadakṣinae* "for the good health of..." (as in the Shahr-i-Nāpursān inscription cited above in part 3), or the very common *puyae* "for the honoring of...," as in the several examples cited in parts 3 and 4. The beneficiaries of such a blessing might have been the donor's parents, with a phrase like the ubiquitous *matapitu puyae* "for the honoring of mother and father" (e.g. in the Taxila silver scroll inscription, Konow 1929: 77 [no. XXVII]), but this is no more than an educated guess. We can, however, confidently assert in light of the preceding discussion that the lost portion of the inscription would have been something in this vein, rather than a label to the missing third figure of the statue.

In conclusion, we can now say about the inscription in question that:

(1) It definitely contains no reference to Amitābha, as was claimed by Brough and Fussman.

(2) The word *oloiśpare* is apparently not a form of the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, as it has previously been taken, although it remains uncertain what it actually means.

(3) Except for the difficult word *oloiśpare*, the inscription follows a normal pattern for Buddhist donative inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī script on sculptures and other objects, and should be interpreted as such.

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Figures 1-4

All figures are printed courtesy of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.
The relief is catalogued as:
Unknown artist, Gandharan
Untitled (fragment of relief depicting a Buddha), 3rd-4th century A.D.
Gray schist, 12 × 9 1/2 inches, MF94.8.5
Gift of Eleanor B. Lehner, Collection of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida.